

Gary Erb has been an air force sergeant, a flight instructor, and for ten years an activist against nuclear weapons, "low intensity" warfare and other manifestations of imperialism. Imperialism is not a policy, but a mentality. This book is about that mentality. It is his fifth.

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Ironies

Poems by Gary Erb

B

There is law because injustice

Can't be let

To coexist with order.

There is prison

Where disorder

Cannot coexist with cruelty.

IRONIES

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information contact Laughing Waters
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This one for Katya Komisaruk, American
political prisoner serving a five year
sentence for upholding the Nuremburg
Principals.



recycled paper

The little child cries
Over a rabbit
Killed in the street.

The graduating class
Cheers the bombing of Tripoli.

The boy remembers the taste of the
ice cream.

The man remembers her smile when she
gave it.

Ranks of tulips in a garden
Are decadent after their season.

The meadow, wild with variety
Is ever young.

The Druid worshiped the tree.
The bishop whittled a cross.

VALUE

When a 200 grand house burns down
 The family picks through the ashes
 For blurry snapshots,
 Grandfather's wood carvings.
 Things not worth pocket change.

CHARITY

In China bird sellers
 Captured wild sparrows.
 Those who had gold
 Bought a bird to set free.
 The slumlord
 Gives to a scholarship fund.

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THE SANCTUARY

The bishop decrys,

"It is a sin

Just to WISH someone evil."

Sermon completed

He leads them in prayer

To be safe from their enemies.

A wife and a mother

The woman

Could go to prison.

But she must

Help this terrified family

From the wrong country.

SPRING

After reading the news on the bus

The man walks by flowering crabtrees.

But the blank look of every face he sees

Speaks louder.

The man whom the jury found innocent

Is glad there's a crowd.

There are people to smile at.

NOMADS

The boy lives to grow up and be free.
The soldier lives for his discharge.
The workingman lives to be foreman.
The foreman lives to retire.
The retiree takes in the drifter.
But the drifter can't stay.

THE HARVEST

The field resists the plow,
The weeds demand the hoe,
And wheat depends on the rain.
The farmer prays.
An enemy's fire brand
Works surely.
He needs no God.

MYSTICS

Hearing the firing
She weeps at her murdered son's picture.
All of them, Contra and Sandinista,
Who'll die
Will be some mother's child.

The priest declares the Blessed Virgin
Desended and ordered him
To destroy the Communist-Atheist
Sandinistas.

THE HITCHIKER

The Porche driver
Would never pick up
A hitchiker.

The hitchiker
Loves the kindness of people
He meets on the highway.

The lawmakers
Make hitchiking a crime
To save him.

APPRECIATION

Well above timber line is a three foot rock. Trailing 10 feet behind it like a tail on a comet is an evergreen. Its top is as flat as a table. No branch peeks above or around the stone to take rock shaving winds. But this is a 50 year old spruce tree, growing where no tree can live.

A hiker asks, "Susan, what is this bush?"

EVERYMAN'S GOD

Five hundred sit down in the road to the Pentagon. MPs in battle dress start to remove them.

The boy being draged says, "Where's your God connection, man?"

"God said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Walk, asshole!"

Says the woman being handcuffed, "God is our mother, everything female."

A man shouts from his car window, "God is our salvation, and you pinko dykes will be a footstool under his feet!"

Says the graying priest being led to the bus, "God is a loving father. Why do you hurt his children?"

Says a black man waving a pistol, "Alah's children will rise again, whitey."

Asks the troop arresting me, "What do you believe?"

I didn't answer.

SELF GROWTH

The pediatrician has a beautiful
 home, a youthful wife, two kids who
 are developing well, a portfolio
 growing at 3% a month, one fourth of
 the clinic, souvenirs from Tahiti
 and Singapore, a flat, hard belly,
 and past life regressions to
 comprehend the journey of his soul.

FREE SPEECH

In the state senate
 The born again Baptist
 Who swore he would never
 Support a state lottery
 Switches

And wins re-election.

The stooped, ragged man
 Whom everyone looks through
 As though through a window
 Is stopped by police
 And arrested

For using obscenities.

COMMON SENSE

The black man
Pays for his groceries.
The cashier
Will not put the change
In his hand.
Customers in line
Glare at the bigot.

The black man
Enters the jewelers.
And at once
All the help surround him.
Customers
All have to wait.
But they know it's good sense.

COMFORT

The pastor says, "You have to remember
Your child's in the hands of God,
And not suffering life on earth."

After he leaves
The three year old
Clutches her mother's leg.

EDUCATION

The bored little boy
Sits in the classroom
Hearing the sister
Who he has to ape
Say things about liberty
He will not remember.

Meanwhile his brother
Is down in the chapel,
Although he would rather
Be out in the sun,
While mother superior's
Leading the class
In singing their joy
That Christ dwells within them.

They will remember that others
Don't have what they do.
And they will be proud of it.

APARTHEIT

The aging white men
Watch ranks of young
Soldiers marching.

The black college men
Pray that insurgents
Will liberate them.

A mother of ten
Prays that the soldiers
Will not kill her kids
In reprisal.

The white bishop says
Liberation would be a just war,
But he'd never himself
Take a life.

The other night she picked a fight with me. Says I can't drink in HER house. Get out of HER house. I tell her to go to hell, and she runs out the back. I call my body and say, "Pick me up. The old lady's gonna call the cops."

He said, "She won't do that." Then there's a knock on the door.

I say, "That's them. They're at the door." I walk over to the door still holding the phone. I crack it and six cops rush in with drawn pistols.

Been here two days. The courts are closed on account of the holiday,

INFIDEL

"Now pick a character," said the speaker. "Jesus, the crowd, the woman or the Pharisee."

...And the scribes and the Pharisees brought him a woman taken in adultery, and said to him, "This woman was caught in the very act of adultery. The law says we should stone her. But master, what do you say we should do with her..."

Four young woman said, "I was the woman taken in adultery. And I felt exploited. I was being used as a scapegoat!"

An older woman said, "I was in the crowd, and I felt jealous of the woman because she could still do it."

And a number of people said, "I was Jesus, and I found a creative way out of my dilemma on the spot!" Many nodded.

Several men said, "I was a Pharisee, and I underwent a great conversion experience!" Everyone said they had.

Then I said, "I was a scribe, and the woman was my God given opportunity to destroy this illiterate carpenter who insulted my priest ancestors, the profession of my life, my place in the world, my personal identity, and threatened the ways I am sworn to protect against the foreigners and infidels, and all I hold sacred."

But he out foxed me. (Clever bastard.) Traped me with my own hypocrisy. I hated him bitterly.

The 20 believers thought that amazing.

IMMORTALITY

The maid leaves for work
 With runs in her stockings.
 Her girls leave for school
 With knee socks that match.

The physician
 Who's made it in real estate
 Builds an industrial park
 With his name on it.

Then the day came they told us we were going home as a unit. The Viet Nameese were taking over our base. Some of the guys were crying on the plane. We'd knew they'd lose it. Unit was in that area for years.

So when we got back we got riot controll. They would tell 'em, "These guys are combat veterans. They're real hard." We didn't give a fuck. God! We had just been doing all that killing and violence. Now we might do it to our own people!

We carried empty weapons, but we had live ammo on our belts. We'd form a wedge and march tward the squad playing the rioters, and they'd yell and throw eggs. Had boxes and boxes of eggs. But they'd throw the eggs over our heads so we'd be all clean and the officer behind us would be just full of egg.

And we'd duck so they could get him. He'd say, "No, no! You're supposed to be protecting me." The rioters would always break up laughing. Sometimes we'd be laughing so much that by the time we got to them we'd fall down. Officer would be really pissed.

Next time it was our turn to be rioters and we'd clobber him. Once a guy got him right in the face. Egg running down all over his face yelling, "You're supposed to get the troops!"

Got out finally. I signed up for six years.

My wife says, "I'm sick and tired of your Viet Nam problems." I got these neurological problems. I get really nervous.

The tanks have formed a circle. Each tank carried a 50 calibre machinegun on it. So I find a spot behind a tank to crouch down. The colonel looks over and says, "What are you doing? Get out there."

And I say, "Fuck you!" Turned out there was no enemy. The driver at the point was high on heroin and ran his tank off the road. Broke both his knees.

The enemy had to be economical with ammunition. They would fire one round of mortar and hit the ammo bunker. We thought nothing of firing a hundred thousand dollars worth.

Once the colonel sent me out to count the dead. We found three dead, burnt pigs. A big one and two little ones. So I call the colonel and say, "We've found three dead, sir. A big porker and two little piggies."

"Why did you say that? I could have claimed three bodies!"

One time we were out on patrol. And we're creeping around looking for them, and they're creeping around looking for us... And suddenly we're facing each other. We're all dead if we start firing so we both just kind of back away a little and stare, then we put down our weapons.

So we ate together. Traded our C rations for their rice, smoked joints. Then we went back. Told the colonel, "They're not in there, sir."

"But we know they're in there. We have all this intelligence."

"They're not in there, sir."

SELECTIVE SERVICE

The old had their power.

The old had their wealth.

The old had prestige.

The old had their past.

The young men had only

The whole of their lives.

POWER

The war correspondants
 Step from their aircraft
 And walk to the General's tent

 Past a soldier who can't stop sobbing
 Who'se just seen his brother
 Heaped up with the dead

 Past a soldier who can't stop drooling
 Who'se mouth has been cotton dry
 For days

 Past an airfield of filthy infantrymen
 Silently waiting
 Their weapons still warm.

 Inside the Colonel
 Dispensing the Word
 Balloons with importance.

VETERAN'S DAY

I got to get out of here. Need to see a VA doctor about these chest pains I have. I got a heart murmur, and I'm taking medication for it. Think it's because of agent orange exposure.

We'd land in these areas and there'd be no leaves on the trees or undergrowth. It'd look like a forest fire'd been through there. I did two tours. Was special forces.

Once we jumped in 'Nam. Now you're supposed to jump into open areas. They had us jump into the trees. You broke through the jungle canopy and there was no light. The moonlight's above. But the enemy is sitting there, and their eyes are used to it.

We lost almost a whole battalion. Hung up, broken up, lost... They said we had all these casualties because we fought a great battle.

The enemy was there, but not that much. The battalion got wiped out because operations screwed up.

One night this column of tanks got in trouble down by the Cambodian border. The company commander says to me, "Sergeant, You're going to their relief." One squad. Ten men!

I say, "But there are no helicopters available."

"There's one." he says. "The general's helicopter."

So we got in the general's personal helicopter, and the general rode along in the front seat.